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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: AFTER ROUND TWO OF CONSULTATIONS, MINDEF MURR,
HAMADEH EXPECT STREET ACTION

REF: BEIRUT 3565

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a 11/07 meeting with the Ambassador, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr said that, based on his current understanding of the political consultations chaired by Parliament Speaker Berri, he felt certain that Hizballah and Michel Aoun would take their fight to the streets immediately after the cabinet debates the UN/OLA tribunal documents. Murr expected the March 14 majority to respond in kind. He expressed confidence in the army preventing violence or strangulation of key institutions, but he worried that March 14 and PM Siniora in particular may not have the stomach for sustained protests. Citing confidential sources, Murr said that Hizballah and Aoun were prepared to stay on the streets for two months or more. Their goal, he said, is the blocking minority in the cabinet, in order to stop the tribunal, stall implementation of UNSCR 1701, derail Paris III, and prevent a March 14 president from taking office. Murr said that his father, pro-Syrian MP Michel Murr, had met privately with Berri, Aoun, and Hizballah representatives but failed to work out a compromise. Separately, reporting on the 11/7 round of consultations, Minister Marwan Hamadeh told us that neither side had moved an inch from the previous day's positions (reftel), although the language and threats to take to the streets were more frightening. Consultations are suspended until Thursday. Hamadeh, like Murr, thought street action inevitable, and he wondered about the timing of Berri's upcoming trip to Iran. End summary.

MURR PREDICTS STREET ACTION

12. (C) Comparing notes with the Ambassador on 11/7 regarding the just-concluded second round of political consultations, Murr, citing his father as well as other sources in the talks, claimed that the two sides hardened their positions. Based on his current reading of the situation, Murr expected Hizballah and Michel Aoun to make good on their threats to take their fight to change the cabinet to the street. And he expected March 14 forces to respond in kind, in order not to be perceived as weak. Right now, he said, "I don't see any way out of this except by the street. And who knows where the street will take us."

13. (C) The timing of the consultations, he predicted, will be linked to the formal submission to the cabinet of the tribunal documents. At that point, March 14 ministers will insist on quick cabinet approval to forward the documents to the parliament immediately for ratification. Citing the need to study the details and picking up on Russian reservations, the Shia ministers will storm out of the cabinet session ("as they did on December 12"), on the pretext that they are being rushed into something. The next day, Hizballah and Aoun will muster hundreds of thousands of people for sit-ins and protests. Murr said that neither Berri nor Walid Jumblatt want to take to the streets, but neither have yet figured a way out of the current impasse. More than anyone else, Murr said, "Berri will lose" on the streets, as Hizballah will be so obviously stronger and better organized than Berri's Amal movement that disaffected Berri supporters will switch to the winning team. Berri, unfortunately, has little choice in the matter.

CAN MARCH 14 SUSTAIN POWER
IF DEMONSTRATIONS LAST TWO MONTHS?

14. (C) Murr expressed confidence that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which will take the lead from the ISF to handle civil unrest, will be able to keep major roads open and prevent the sackng or cutting off of key facilities. PM Siniora's Grand Serail office will not be sacked. But he worried that the March 14 forces and PM Siniora in particular may not have the stomach for the sustained demonstrations Aoun and Hizballah have planned. He said that Hizballah and

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Michel Aoun have calculated that it may take up to two months to reach their goals, and they plan to have ongoing protests and sit-ins well into 2007.

PLANNING FOR ALL CONTINGENCIES --
INCLUDING SIT-IN AGAINST EMBASSY

15. (C) While he said that he had no specific information, he added that he was prepared for the all contingencies, including the possibility of sit-ins near the American Embassy. Hizballah may want to send a message that the March 14 governing majority is composed of U.S.agents, and what better way than to make headlines by protesting near the Embassy. Aoun would "never" join such a sit-in, given the notorious Aounist attack against the Embassy in 1989. Thank heavens, Murr said, that the Embassy had not moved to its planned new cite near the Shia southern suburbs, where Hizballah would be able to mobilize "100,000 people in half an hour." Now, Hizballah cannot easily move mass numbers of supporters to the Embassy, given its distance from the Hizballah neighborhoods, and the army can place numerous checkpoints along the way.

GOAL: STOP 1701, TRIBUNAL, PARIS III,
AND ELECTION OF MARCH 14 PRESIDENT

16. (C) According to Murr, Hizballah and Aoun's goals are simple -- to gain the blocking minority in the cabinet, in order to prevent four developments: the establishment of the special tribunal, further implementation of UNSCR 1701, the realization of Paris III and a reform plan that puts Lebanon squarely on a western-oriented course, and the election of a March 14 president. While Hizballah and Aoun insist on the removal of Minister of Justice Charles Rizk and Minister of Culture Tariq Mitri, as both are seen as having betrayed Lahoud and the pro-Syrians in the international arena, Rizk and Mitri are "minor issues." If a way could be found to gain the blocking minority without kicking off Rizk and

Mitri, then Hizballah could achieve its goals anyway and a neutered Rizk could stay at Justice.

MICHEL MURR FAILS WITH COMPROMISE

¶7. (C) Murr said that he had just seen his father Michel, who briefed him on a private meeting he had with Berri, Aoun, Hizballah MP Mohammed Ra'ad, and Hizballah Minister of Energy and Water Mohammed Fneish. Michel Murr (who participates in the consultations) proposed to the others what Elias thought a reasonable option: that they offer to March 14 to keep the current 24-member cabinet but kick off three ministers (Rizk, Mitri, and Minister of Economy and Trade Sami Haddad) in favor of three Aoun ministers. Aoun was intrigued, but Hizballah refused, saying that they did not have a guarantee of the blocking minority of "more than a third" with only eight (three Aounists, five Shia). Michel Murr tried to argue that Elias was, in fact, a neutral voice that could swing back and forth depending on the issue.

¶8. (C) Ra'ad responded that Elias is the "most American" of all the ministers, as bad if not worse than Siniora. Michel Murr also failed to convince Ra'ad that Minister of Environment Yacoub Sarraf could be counted upon for the blocking vote; Ra'ad claimed that Sarraf, a Greek Orthodox like the Murrs, was falling under the bad influence of Elias and untrustworthy. Elias Murr also shared several other complicated formulas for potential cabinet expansion discussed by his father with Aoun and the Shia (including a 26-member and a 30-member cabinet) but expressed doubt that any could be sold to the March 14 leaders. Aoun, Murr said, would insist on three ministers in a 24-member cabinet, four ministers in a 26-member cabinet, and five ministers in a 30-member cabinet.

HAMADEH CITES TOUGHENED RHETORIC;
WONDERS ABOUT BERRI'S TRIP

¶9. (C) Separately, Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh (close to Jumblatt) told the Ambassador that neither the March 8 or March 14 sides had moved "one inch" during the 11/07 consultations. The rhetoric, he said, was far tougher than on Day One (see reftel), with Hariri in particular

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warning explicitly that, if Hizballah and Aoun demonstrate, then they will not be alone in the streets. Aoun was curiously low key, a stance Hamadeh interpreted as Aoun not wanting to frighten his followers that he was leading them into adventurism with Hizballah. Hamadeh mused about any linkage between Berri's trip to Iran (starting Sunday) and timing for ending the consultations: would Berri dare to go to Teheran without an answer about what happens next? Hamadeh thought that, given the lack of any flexibility by either side, street action was inevitable, at least based on the atmosphere after the second round of consultations. Perhaps the individual talks to take place on Wednesday will lead to a breakthrough when the participants resume formal consultations on Thursday. But he was doubtful.

COMMENT

¶10. (C/NF) As always, there was a touch of the self-serving in Murr's presentation: did Hizballah MP Ra'ad really call Murr "the most American" minister when Hizballah consistently reserves that charge for Hamadeh, Nayla Mouawad, and Siniora? Is Murr as confident as he says that the Grand Serail will be protected? In any case, we think Murr the Father's proposal was not as benign as Elias' casual description would have us believe: We have seen no evidence indicating that Yacoub Sarraf would ever side in a cabinet showdown with the March 14 majority, meaning that, out of 24 cabinet members under Michel Murr's formula, a solid blocking minority of

nine would be with the Syrians: five Shia, Sarraf, and three Aounists. In that scenario, as the power starts shifting back to Elias Murr's former masters, March 14 ministers would probably have their suspicions about Elias Murr's reliability, too.

¶11. (C/NF) As of now, Hizballah appears to be in this fight for however long it takes to achieve at least a blocking minority. Whatever the imperfections of UNIFIL and LAF deployment in the south, despite whatever unseemly informal understandings UNIFIL and the LAF may have concluded with Hizballah, it is clear that Hizballah is far more constrained in south Lebanon than it was before July 12. Today, Hizballah would have trouble blatantly snatching Israeli soldiers from across the international frontier. We doubt Hizballah wants to be seen as having trapped the LAF between the Israeli forces and Hizballah fighters. The exhausted Shia population probably would not currently support action that would attract a ferocious Israeli response.

¶12. (C/NF) So, with the Israeli front currently closed, Hizballah -- along with its Syrian and Iranian backers, presumably -- has changed its focus to reversing the Cedar Revolution and using all means to seize effective control of what passes for the Lebanese state. It is sad that Aoun has stoked anti-Sunni ("Wahabi") fears in order to lure his following into providing Christian cover for Hizballah's efforts. Without Aoun, the pro-Syrian actions would be seen for what they are: a threat to use force to seize decisive power and reverse a victory most Lebanese welcomed in spring ¶2005. We wish that the delight that Hizballah, Syria, and Iran must feel about Aoun's opportunistic position was somehow revealed to Aoun's followers, who might start to question where their leader is taking them.

FELTMAN